

VZCZCXYZ0009  
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBS #1592/01 3291547  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH (CCY ADE09249 MSI5653-695)  
O 251547Z NOV 09 ZDS  
FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9741  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RHEFDHN/DIA DH WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS BRUSSELS 001592

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D COPY TEXT AND SIGNATURE  
STATE PASS EUR/WE

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [BE](#)  
SUBJECT: BELGIUM: LETERME II GOVERNMENT SWORN IN NOVEMBER 25

REF: A. BRUSSELS 1582  
[1](#)B. BRUSSELS 1579

[1](#)1. (U) A new Belgian government was sworn in by King Albert II on Wednesday, November 25, highlighted by the return of Flemish Christian Democrat (CD&V) Yves Leterme as Prime Minister, and fellow CD&V member Steven Vanackere replacing Leterme as Foreign Minister. Leterme served as PM from March to December 2008 (Leterme I) and as Foreign Minister from July 2009 until his return to the PM's office. The changes were necessary due to the selection on November 19 of outgoing PM Herman Van Rompuy as the first President of the EU Council. PM Leterme will present his government's coalition agreement to Parliament on November 25 or 26, and a vote of confidence in the new government will soon follow (within 48 hours).

[1](#)2. (U) The only other cabinet change besides the PM and FM positions was the return of CD&V member Inge Vervotte as Minister of Public Enterprises and Civil Service, where she replaced Vanackere. Bios of the three new officials are in paragraphs 4-10.

[1](#)3. (U) Belgium's New Cabinet (title, name, (party)):

-----  
-- Prime Minister Yves Leterme (CD&V)  
  
-- Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Institutional Reform, Didier Reynolds (MR - Francophone Liberal)  
  
-- Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Institutional Reform, Steven Vanackere (CD&V)  
  
-- Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Social Affairs, Public Health, and Social Integration, Laurette Onkelinx (PS - Francophone Socialist)  
  
-- Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Labor and Equality, Migration and Asylum Policy, Joelle Milquet (CdH - Francophone Center Humanist)  
  
-- Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Budget, Guy Vanhengel (OpenVLD - Flemish Liberal)  
  
-- Minister of Public Enterprises and Civil Service, Inge Vervotte (CD&V)  
  
-- Minister of Justice, Stefaan De Clerck (CD&V)  
  
-- Minister of Defense, Pieter De Crem (CD&V)  
  
-- Minister for Small and Medium Enterprises, Agriculture,

and Science Policy, Sabine Laruelle (MR)

-- Minister of Pensions and Large Cities, Michel Daerden (PS)

-- Minister of Climate and Energy, Paul Marnette (PS)

-- Minister of Development Cooperation, Charles Michel (MR)

-- Minister of Interior, Annemie Turtelboom (Open VLD)

-- Minister of Enterprise, Vincent Van Quickenborne (Open VLD)

BIO: Prime Minister Yves Leterme

14. (SBU) Belgian Prime Minister Yves Camille Desire Leterme is a member of the Flemish Christian Democrats (CD&V). He was Belgian Foreign Minister from July 2009 until being sworn in as Prime Minister on November 25, 2009, and was Prime Minister from March 2008 to December 2008. Leterme received a record breaking number of preferential votes, 800,000, in the 2007 general election, the second largest number of votes ever gained in the history of Belgian elections. Following that election, the King tasked Leterme with forming a new government. However, Leterme was unable to form a government between July and December 2007 due to tensions between the Flemish and Francophone parties. As a result, the King asked previous PM Guy Verhofstadt to form an interim government until Leterme was able to negotiate an agreement to form his own majority coalition, which he did from December 2007 to March 2008. Leterme finally became Prime Minister of a five-party coalition on March 20, 2008. He survived his government's first crisis, when his electoral ally, the

Flemish National N-VA, broke with the CD&V because Leterme did not succeed in achieving the electoral and government competency reforms dear to the N-VA. In December 2008, however, the Leterme government fell under a media and public outcry over alleged interference with a court case related to the Belgian government's takeover and sale to French bank BNP Paribas of the struggling banking group Fortis during the international financial crisis. A parliamentary investigation found no evidence of Leterme's alleged interference in March 2009, and his replacement as PM, Herman Van Rompuy, brought Leterme back into the government as FM in July 2009.

15. (SBU) Leterme became involved in politics when he was appointed to the Belgian Federal Parliament's House of Representatives in 1997. He won his own seat in the 1999 and 2003 elections. After the defeat of the CD&V in the general elections of 2003, he succeeded Stefaan De Clerck as party chairman. He became Flemish Minister-President after the regional elections of 2004; his party did very well due to the new alliance with the Flemish National N-VA. He then led the same alliance to a resounding success in the federal election of 2007. Leterme has been a member of the West Flanders city council of Ieper since 1995, and served there as an alderman from 1995 to 2001. Before entering politics, Leterme served as an auditor at the Belgian Court of Audits and an EU civil servant.

16. (SBU) Leterme sees himself as a no-nonsense man. His immense popularity in polls of Flemish voters contrasts with the lack of support he has found in the past among his political colleagues and Belgium's Francophone citizens. Leterme holds a political science degree from the University of Ghent. He speaks Dutch, French, and English. He was born in Wervik, Belgium on October 6, 1960. He is married and has three children. Leterme enjoys cycling and is a fan of the Standard Liege soccer team.

BIO: Vice PM and FM Steven Vanackere

17. (SBU) Before being sworn in November 25 as Vice Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Institutional Reform,

Steven Vanackere (CD&V) was Vice Premier and Minister for Public Enterprises and Civil Service and for Institutional Reform from July to November 2009. From June 2007 to December to 2008, Vanackere served as the Flemish Regional Minister for Welfare, Health, and Family. He served as a member of the Flemish Parliament from June 2004 to June 2007.

In 2004, Vanackere served as an advisor to former CD&V chairman and Prime Minister, Herman Van Rompuy and Brussels Regional Minister Chabert. In 2000, he became Deputy Director-General of Brussels Transport, resigning in 2005. From 1993-2000, Vanackere was Director-General of the Port of Brussels.

¶8. (SBU) Vanackere was born in Wevelgem, Belgium on February 4, 1964. He obtained his undergraduate degree in Political Science and his Master's in Economics from the Catholic University of Leuven in 1985, and his Master's in Law in ¶1987. He speaks Flemish, French, and English. Vanackere is married with no children. He and his wife live in Brussels. He is the son of Leo Vanackere, Provincial Governor of West Flanders (1979) and grandson of Wallays Remi, former Mayor of Wevelgem.

BIO: Min Civil Service and Public Enterprises Inge Vervotte

-----

¶9. (SBU) Belgium's New Minister of Civil Service and Public Enterprises Inge Marie Roger Ghislaine Vervotte, held a similar position during the Leterme I government, Minister of Public Service and Transportation. Vervotte, a Leterme protegee, started her professional career with the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (ACV). She became known to the public for defending the interests of the Sabena Airline workers when the company was liquidated in November ¶2001. Shortly thereafter, she entered politics as a member of the CD&V. In the federal elections of 2003, she was elected to the Belgian House of Representatives. In the summer of 2004, she was appointed Flemish Regional Minister for Welfare, Public Health, and Family. After the CD&V electoral success in the Belgian Federal elections of 2007, she received a place in Parliament, and then joined the Leterme government. As a close Leterme ally, she resigned with him in December 2008. She has served as a Federal deputy between her resignation and re-appointment in the

Leterme II government. She has remained one of the top five most popular Flemish politicians throughout this period.

¶10. (SBU) Inge Vervotte was born in Bonheiden, Belgium on December 27, 1977. She graduated from the Kathoillieke Sociale Hogeschool University in Heverlee, Belgium in 1998, where she received her degree in social work.

EASON